

Gloria Tennes

Q&A

SAMUEL CLEMENS

Gloria Tennes (aka Gloria Tracy) is a brilliant musician who fell into acting as the 1960s approached. She attended the Westlake College of Modern Music where she was proficient with the harp. She was gorgeous, too, being crowned Miss Glendale of 1958 and Miss Los Angeles of 1959. After appearing in stage productions like *Chicken Every Sunday* and *Ken Murray's Blackouts*, she did the television series *Your Town's Talent* and *House Party*. Her movies included *Li'l Abner* (1959), *A Private's Affair* (1959), and *This Rebel Breed* (1960). Her love wasn't acting, though, but music. She started the Gloria Tracy Quartette and toured the country performing at venues like M'Goo's, the Tropicana Hotel, the Sands, the Ritz Theater, and the Nevada Room. Sidney Skolsky called her "the best female jazz harpist of them all." She still performs and occasionally attends film festivals. She is popular with filmgoers for her iconic role as a member of the all-girl jazz band fronted by Sugar Kane (Marilyn Monroe) in *Some Like It Hot* (1959).

Samuel Clemens: What got you into the entertainment industry?

Gloria Tennes: I began studying music as a child. I learned the harp and flute. I was homeschooled, so my parents thought that I should learn an actual skill if I ever got into show business. I was an ugly duckling who grew into a beautiful swan. As my career took off, I broadened my horizons. I studied singing with Robert Maxwell. I took tap dancing in a classroom with Raquel Welch. I studied at Julliard for a while. I had several acting teachers. I did my first solo at the Callboard Theater. I told

the manager that I was 18 years old since they didn't allow children to perform. My mother wrote a doctor's note to get me out of class that day. She was very supportive of my career.

SC: How were you cast in *Some Like It Hot*?

Gloria Tennes: I was living at the Hollywood Studio Club with some friends. A man named Matty Malneck was scouting for women to be in the film. He needed someone who was proficient with the harp who happened to be blonde. We were on set for three months.

SC: What was it like appearing alongside Marilyn Monroe?

Gloria Tennes: She was hard-working. She took her career seriously. She gave me some advice on how to succeed in Hollywood, saying, "You've got to be willing to do everything and anything if you want to get ahead." I didn't like hearing that, no matter how true it was.

SC: Was that why you stopped acting?

Gloria Tennes: My passion was music. I loved touching people's hearts with music. Marilyn was right to an extent, though, as there is a lot that you've got to tolerate. I did a bit on some television show, whose name escapes me, and the director wanted me to sit in Walter Matthau's lap on camera and rub my hands through his greasy hair. I thought to myself, "Do I really want to keep doing this kind of work?" I performed at nightclubs and recorded an album, *Gloria A-Glo*, which topped the charts.

SC: Do you keep in touch with any of your *Some Like It Hot* castmates?

Gloria Tennes: I did until they started passing away. I still keep in touch with Mary Foley. She lives in



Mexico. As far as I know, she and I are the last of the band from that film. I was close with Marian Collier, who died last year. I wanted to get ahold of Sandra [Warner] before she died, but I heard she had Alzheimer's disease.

SC: You were one of the performers on *The Spade Cooley Show*. Can you tell us about that?

Gloria Tennes: I was in practically every episode. I was billed as "The Heavenly Harpist." I met Jo Ann Castle on set, and we became inseparable. We're still great friends. It was a great gig until Spade was arrested. For those who don't know this, he was convicted of murdering his wife. I couldn't believe it until the evidence began piling up.



Suzanne Alexander, David Janssen and Gloria Tennes in the 1959 Richard Diamond, Private Detective episode "The Sport."



In 1966, under her married name Gloria Tracy, she recorded the album *Gloria A-Glo*.



Gloria on *The Spade Cooley Show*.



Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis (center) are surrounded by (L to R top) Joan King, Diana Booth, Helen Perry, Sandra Warner, with Kay Hickman (L center); Laurie Mitchell (R center); Colleen O'Sullivan (lower L) and Gloria Tennes (lower R) in this publicity shot from *Some Like it Hot* (1959).



Gloria Tennes, Miss Los Angeles, left; Cheryl Blake, Miss Altadena, center; and Ann Marie Hotro, Miss South San Gabriel.

SC: How were you cast in *The Ladies Man* (1961)?

Gloria Tennes: Jerry Lewis interviewed me for that. He said, "I heard that you're the best." I

said, "I don't know about that." He said, "My dear, I need to know that you're the best if you want to be in my picture." I said, "Okay, I'm the best." He said, "You got the part." I assume that he was trying to boost my confidence. It wasn't a huge part. I left the production briefly to do a four-week run at the Flamingo Hotel. He was very accommodating. It was well-known that he was a womanizer, but he was kind as could be to me.

SC: Was there an onscreen role that you pursued, but didn't get? How about a role that you rejected?

Gloria Tennes: I was offered the starring role in *Sugar on Broadway* by Gower Champion in 1971.

That was the opportunity of a lifetime. I couldn't do it, though. I had just given birth, and I had serious complications. I had to focus on my health, so I told him I would pass on it. He seemed as disappointed as I was.

SC: What are you doing these days?

Gloria Tennes: I attended the Coronado Film Festival a few years ago to promote *Some Like It Hot*. I stopped performing after the pandemic, but I'll start doing that again since restrictions are being lifted. I still love the harp. I have four children who live nearby, but they are not musicians like I am. My son owns a successful restaurant named Courage Bagels.